Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

September 9, 1999

1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
  Fisheries Division
  Endangered Species Coordinator
  Nongame Coordinator
  Bozeman Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Beaverhead County Conservation District, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Mr. John Malesich, 9025 Highway 41, Dillon, MT 59725

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to install an upstream migration barrier in Spring Creek to halt further expansion of brook trout distribution and to remove the potential for westslope cutthroat trout hybridization with rainbow trout. The intent of the project is to protect a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout. This proposed project is located approximately 12 miles northeast of the town of Dillon in Beaverhead County. Spring Creek is a tributary to the Beaverhead River.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., October 12, 1999 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Spring Creek Native Fish Protection Barrier Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This program calls for the enhancement of bull trout and cutthroat trout through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the Future Fisheries Program. This project is being proposed to install an upstream migration barrier in Spring Creek to halt further expansion of brook trout distribution and remove the potential for westslope cutthroat trout hybridization with rainbow trout. Spring Creek currently supports a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout, a species that is a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The project site, involving a single property owner, is located approximately 12 miles northeast of the town of Dillon in Beaverhead County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Spring Creek, a tributary to the Beaverhead River, located approximately 12 miles northeast of the town of Dillon within Township 6 South, Range 6 West, Sections 29 and 30 in Beaverhead County.

II. Need for the Project: Department Goal C indicates that a Fisheries Division objective is to "provide and support programs to conserve and enhance high quality aquatic habitat and protect native aquatic species." The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is a tool to help achieve that objective.

Spring Creek supports a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout. However, sampling in 1997 revealed that non-native brook trout had invaded the stream via a private pond that had been constructed as a reservoir on the main channel. This private pond contains non-native brook trout and rainbow trout. The brook trout are a competitive threat to westslope cutthroat trout and the rainbow trout pose a threat of hybridization with westslope cutthroat trout.

III. Scope of the Project:

The proposal calls for installing an over-sized 30 foot squash culvert (5 feet ID) in a manner that would cut-off a tight meander bend and would be skewed above channel grade to provide a 1.5 to 2.0 foot vertical drop to the downstream water surface. To prevent downstream scour and plunge pool development, the receiving pool will be over-excavated into an elliptical shape and lined with large rip-rap quality rock. Rock immediately below the outfall will be crowned to form a splash apron. The proposed culvert is over-sized to avoid bedload accumulation, blockage or

washout. The barrier would protect approximately 5.0 miles of westslope cutthroat trout habitat. This project is expected to cost $7,000.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to $6,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

This project will protect a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout from competition by non-native brook trout and from potential hybridization with non-native rainbow trout.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. Prior to construction, the Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. Additionally, a 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District.

5. Aesthetics.

The placement of a perched culvert on Spring Creek would not be aesthetically pleasing. However, the proposed project is located on private land that is far from any public access point. If future management should change and the barrier becomes unnecessary, the culvert could be removed at minimal cost and the disturbed channel could readily be restored.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources.

Westslope cutthroat trout is a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act. Spring Creek contains a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout. A westslope cutthroat trout conservation agreement drafted by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks calls for protecting all pure westslope cutthroat trout populations as one of its main objectives. Westslope cutthroat trout in Spring Creek are now threatened by non-native brook trout and rainbow trout. The intent of this proposal is to protect approximately 5.0 miles of westslope cutthroat trout habitat in Spring Creek.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office has been contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

Public angling opportunity is not a component of this project. This project is located on private land that is far remove from any point of public access.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, an extinction threat to the westslope cutthroat trout population found in Spring Creek would remain high. Brook trout would likely to continue to expand their range and density, increasing competitive pressures on westslope cutthroat trout. Additionally, the probability of rainbow trout hybridizing with westslope cutthroat trout would remain high.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is intended to protect a genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout in approximately 5.0 miles of Spring Creek. The proposed barrier would prevent upstream migration of both brook trout and rainbow trout. Brook trout compete with westslope cutthroat trout for food and space and rainbow trout pose a threat of hybridization. Upon installation of the barrier, non-native brook trout and rainbow trout (if present) would be captured by electrofishing and relocated to habitats downstream of the barrier. This proposed alternative would help conserve this westslope cutthroat trout population and would help reduce the risk of its extinction.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent

upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on the Montana Electronic Bulletin Board.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on October 12, 1999.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

Telephone: (406) 444-2432

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Spring Creek Native Fish Protection Barrier Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project This project is being proposed to install an upstream migration barrier in Spring Creek to halt further expansion of non-native brook trout distribution and to remove the potential for westslope cutthroat trout hybridizing with non-native rainbow trout. The project site, involving one landowner, is located approximately 12 miles northeast of the town of Dillon in Beaverhead County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

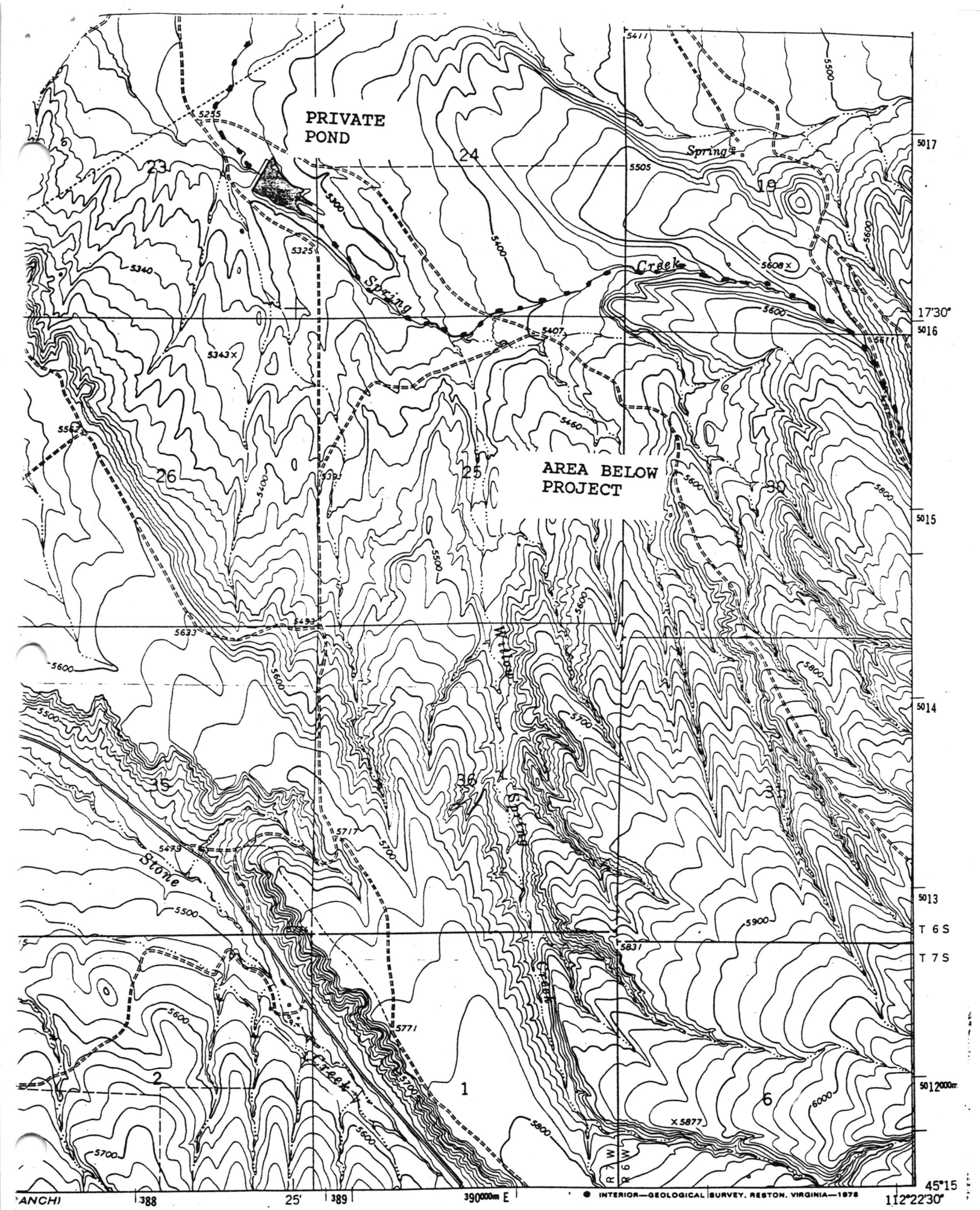
	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats			X			X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture				X		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality				X		
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources		X				X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities				X		X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction Beaverhead County Conservation District, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of

Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office
Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Dick Oswald, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
EA prepared by : Mark Lere
Date: August 27, 1999



ATTACHMENT 1